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Fact Sheet

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Neighbor-to-Neighbor Conservation

United States
Department of
Agriculture



Soil
Conservation
Service

It's old. It's new. It's conservation revitalized!

Coffee shops and cafes promote it. Banks, barber shops, agribusinesses, and schools publicize it. Farmers, ranchers, and city people volunteer for it.

It's NEIGHBOR-TO-NEIGHBOR CONSERVATION—a grassroots outreach program that is breathing new life into the conservation ethic through person-to-person action on the land and neighborly talk among friends in local businesses.

NEIGHBOR-TO-NEIGHBOR began in the 12-county Platte Territory of northwest Missouri in 1986 and has become a model for national emulation. Scores of conservation districts and more than 1,000 volunteer farmers, ranchers, and city people are actively involved.

The Concept

The concept is as old as our Nation and as fresh as today's newspaper headlines. Volunteer farmers, ranchers, and urbanites serve as hosts to people who want to view their conservation practices. Visitors may talk with their hosts and walk the land with them or take self-guided conservation tours.

In either case, NEIGHBOR-TO-NEIGHBOR is strengthened by the world's newest and oldest forms of communication. The newest: computerized, site-by-site data. The oldest: one-to-one back-fence, coffee shop, front porch conversation.

Variety of Practices

The computerized data give prospective visitors detailed information about the conservation practices they can view at participating farms, ranches, and urban properties. The variety and number of practices showcased are impressive. Among the more than 50 practices are windbreak renovation, rotation grazing, sustainable agriculture, warm-season grasses, grass waterways, Christmas tree planting, and surge flow irrigation.

Information about these practices has been gathered through the teamwork of conservation districts; rural and urban landowners; USDA Soil Conservation Service area and district conservationists; the USDA Extension Service and Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service; the Missouri Department of Conservation; and other public and private sector cooperating agencies and groups.

Conservation Notebooks

NEIGHBOR-TO-NEIGHBOR notebooks are indispensable links between the public and conservationists who showcase their land. The books contain the computerized data that relate to each conservation site. They are placed in coffee shops, banks, farm machinery and garden centers, and other public places. Each book is cross-referenced with the names and telephone numbers of host farmers, ranchers, and other conservationists; the practices they are showcasing; and maps that show the location of conservation sites. The notebooks also contain removable fact sheets that describe each conservation practice; people are encouraged to take these fact sheets home for further study.

Welcoming Roadsigns

Large NEIGHBOR-TO-NEIGHBOR roadsigns identify the location of each tour site and list conservation measures to be seen there. Visitors may choose to explore a site alone, at a convenient time without notifying the landowner, or to make an appointment with the conservation host for a personally guided walk.

Ongoing Local Outreach

How is NEIGHBOR-TO-NEIGHBOR different from traditional demonstration farms and agricultural field days?

It's an ongoing local outreach for both rural and urban people. It is not an annual or seasonal event. Year round, NEIGHBOR-TO-NEIGHBOR encourages a personal response to conservation practices. Moreover, once the program gets underway, the government is no longer the driving force. The program acquires a highly personalized, one-to-one momentum, and conservation action on the land accelerates.

One farmer sums up the program this way: "What we host farmers tell our neighbors is unrehearsed. We speak our minds frankly about the advantages, disadvantages, costs, and profitability of practices we've put on our land. This means a lot to neighbors who are skeptical about changing techniques they've used for decades. And let's face it, when one farmer tells another that something works, the farmer is apt to be believed."

The accuracy of this statement is seen in the success NEIGHBOR-TO-NEIGHBOR has had in helping farmers and ranchers fulfill the conservation provisions of the 1985 Food Security Act. In years to come, it will answer other conservation needs that can't be foreseen today.

How To Implement NEIGHBOR-TO-NEIGHBOR CONSERVATION in Your Community

1. Inventory Your Conservation Needs

Look at resource issues for sources. For example: What conservation practices are needed to reduce soil erosion and improve water quality on farms and ranches? In urban areas, is there a need for improved landscaping on public or private lands? Are stormwater management practices necessary in your community?

2. Identify Priorities

Begin your NEIGHBOR-TO-NEIGHBOR CONSERVATION outreach by promoting conservation practices needed now.

3. Select Tour Sites and Hosts

Identify farmers, ranchers, and urban land users who practice conservation measures that best meet your community's needs. Get their commitment to volunteer to showcase their conservation practices as NEIGHBOR-TO-NEIGHBOR tour hosts.

Seek hosts who are comfortable with a variety of people and at ease when talking about their conservation ethic and activities. Identify tour sites with clearly visible NEIGHBOR-TO-NEIGHBOR roadsigns.

Topics for discussion when visitors arrive at a tour stop might include the following: Which terrace design (broad base, grassed backslope, or narrow base) is most suitable for soil erosion control? How is water quality enhanced by conservation tillage? How do various stormwater management practices prevent flooding?

4. Emphasize Overall Environmental Quality

NEIGHBOR-TO-NEIGHBOR is designed to tell the *broad* conservation story, not just one aspect of it. Therefore, select tour sites that show the interrelationships of natural resources. For example, how conservation activities and wildlife can thrive in harmony with each other. Explain to your visitors how healthy and diverse wildlife populations generally reflect production within long-term land use capabilities.

5. Create Fact Sheets

Develop fact sheets that describe the conservation measures featured at each tour site. Remember that NEIGHBOR-TO-NEIGHBOR's power base is local and intensely personal, yet the base is highly diversified. Contact professional conservationists and public and private organizations for help in creating fact sheets. Government agencies ready to assist in this important task include USDA's Soil Conservation Service, Extension Service, and Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service, and State fish and game agencies. Some helpful private sector groups include the Audubon Society, Farm Bureau, and Future Farmers of America.

Fact sheets should:

- A. Identify tour hosts.
- B. Direct visitors to tour stops.
- C. Describe featured conservation practices and the support measures that make this stop a conservation system.
- D. Tell when the conservation measures were installed.
- E. Tell what government agencies or private organizations provide financial assistance.
- F. Show how wildlife habitat has improved.
- G. Provide additional site information based upon personal interviews with the tour host and resource professionals.
- H. Describe the esthetic qualities of the conservation activities.
- I. Include candid quotes from tour hosts about their conservation objectives. Encourage hosts to discuss the tradeoffs they made in choosing one conservation practice over another.
- J. Give the address and telephone number of your conservation district and encourage tour participants to contact the district for further information.

6. Consolidate Fact Sheets for Public Presentation

Create NEIGHBOR-TO-NEIGHBOR notebooks which include multiple rip-out copies of all fact sheets developed in your district. Index the notebooks by host name and by featured conservation practices.

7. Use Your Imagination

Place notebooks where neighbor meets neighbor—in coffee shops, garden centers, grain elevators, district offices, barber shops, farm machinery dealerships, grocery stores, libraries, schools, and civic centers.

8. Keep Tours Current

Conservation is an ongoing, ever-changing process; therefore, conservation treatments require the perspective of time. Update your fact sheets and your tours as conservation requirements change.

9. Use Computer Software That Is Ready for You Now

From start to finish, the entire NEIGHBOR-TO-NEIGHBOR concept can be managed through an easy-to-use computer program now available. The software, copyrighted by the Conservation Commission of the State of Missouri, can be used with any personal computer that runs MS-DOS. It makes it easy to inventory tour sites, create fact sheets, and manage notebooks. The program also enables you to provide timely information about changing conditions at tour sites.

Any additional information relative to NEIGHBOR-TO-NEIGHBOR can be obtained from the State Information Officer, USDA, Soil Conservation Service, 555 Vandiver Drive, Columbia, MO 65202. Telephone: (314) 875-5227.

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